

## The “bodily fluid” theory of private property



Stanley Kubrick's [Dr. Strangelove](#)

*In which we discuss the justification for – and limits of – private property, along with various bodily fluids, the number 42, John Locke, Plato, Thrasymachus, Elon Musk, and Luigi Mangione & more.*

### Two philosophical questions about property

1. How does property, especially *private* property, come to be?<sup>1</sup>
2. Are there *limits to the concentration*<sup>2</sup> of property?

We will review John Locke's theory of property, make explicit how it justifies and limits power, show how it does not describe contemporary understandings of what legitimizes property/power, and ask what consequences follow.

The second question doesn't appear to have been addressed directly by very many thinkers. Perhaps, because, until fairly recently, human finitude on these matters was taken for granted. By “finitude,” we mean that there are conceivable counterforces that would place limits on a concentration of wealth, at

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1. This topic assumes a liberal Western capitalist understanding of property: that it is *prima facie* acceptable to amass it legally if it is the fruit of labor. Marxist conceptions of property are more conditional. We won't be discussing the conflict between these different views this time. Adam Smith, the father of capitalism, and Karl Marx, the father of socialism, and their distinct fundamental principles will be its own future topic. Specifically, we will emphasize and critique how much their views *share* since this is rarely acknowledged or discussed.

2. “Private” property already implies a concentration. Public, or items in the state of nature, are dispersed.

least for individuals, if not also for groups, such as death or competitors for the same resources. Such limits have been historically assumed. No one seriously dreamed that there might *not* be limits. No one believed “you *can* take it with you.” Heritages of scarcity, still too recent in our history, didn’t permit the mental space for the thought. The bare notion of *infinite or limitless* wealth requires the removal of all physical and non-physical limitation. It seems, however, some people today are beginning to conceive the possibility – or act as though they are; by some [transhumanists](#), for example, but also by some very potent contemporary characters with related philosophies such as Elon Musk.

The thinker closest (I can find) to grounding the legitimacy of human possession in something *finite* is the early British empiricist John Locke. We are going to extract an implication from his argument. A kernel of an idea in Locke suggests *there are limits to what we may own* and hints as to how we may run up against those limits. Though Locke was no enemy of private property, I will try to show that if some extrapolated version of his theory can no longer be defended as a description of how we regard property today, then we may have to retreat to an understanding of power and possession recalling an even older idea – one found in Thrasymachus, the sophist, appearing briefly at the start of Plato’s longest dialogue, the [Republic](#). Plato, via Socrates, expresses his distaste for Thrasymachus’ famous blunt claim to the effect that “might makes right.” Plato thought it would be disturbing if this were true. To combat it, he was forced to stray considerably far from what philosophers sometimes call our *animality* (the idea that everything about us is continuous with nature) and concoct an abstract theory of justice and morality. Animals don’t need theories as, it seems, people do. Theories are fragile because they largely rest on flattering our capabilities for invention, for conjuring notions like “humanity,” “rights,” and “civilization.” But Plato’s theory was not wholly ethereal. He was an idealist but did attempt to rest his theory on the observation that collectively we stand a better chance of survival than we do as individuals and to survive collectively we need to coexist in some kind of harmony. And this insight places boundaries on just *how much* power/property can be concentrated in one individual. Hence, we need to cooperate. This means we can’t, as individuals, always get what we want. It means concentrated might cannot be the final arbiter of what *ought* to prevail. We must compromise, *all of us*, to get sometimes *enough* of what we want to keep us invested in the well-being of all... but *none* of us are entitled to get all that we may desire.

*But what if this conviction isn’t true?*

Then it seems we can’t escape being thrown back on to Thrasymachus’ principle, the consequences of which, we’ll show can be pretty extreme. It implies that moral notions are *entirely* social constructions; those with the power to construct and enforce these norms will determine what is morally acceptable and what is not. *Morality becomes subservient to law*, thus those who create law have the final say... It means, among other things, that *murder may be acceptable* if you are empowered to say so, if it serves the interests of the powerful at any point in time.

To resist the idea that morality is subservient to law is necessarily a path to upheaval.

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We proceed with some assumptions in Locke... For the duration of your consciousness, at least, your physical body is *yours* if anything in the universe ever is. Anything tainted by your body makes it an eligible addition to your realm of possessions. There is biological backing for this idea. One of the concrete ways we taint our environment is by contaminating items in it with our secretions. Before

there were contracts and laws, before norms of any sort, intimacy leading to concepts of possession was achieved by sharing fluids. Later, of course, we interpreted “secretions” so broadly that merely to exhale in your vicinity is enough for me to say, I have a “relationship” to you: I *know* you.<sup>3</sup>

The tightness of possession comes in degrees. Some things are more seriously, inviolably, yours than others. This is why, for instance, rape is a more grievous crime than stealing your wallet.<sup>4</sup> It is a harm addressed more intimately to you.

But the lesson here is that *at the beginning of owning* is being *near enough* an object or person to share some molecules of a fluid with it or her or him – even in the form of aerosolized fluids – droplets. We invite ownership like we do some diseases.

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Late in 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Locke theorized that “property” comes into being when we mix our *effort* with external natural resources. The first farmer *worked* a field and, as a consequence, the field became *theirs*. The field and its fruits went from being no one’s, a part of nature, to becoming *the property of* someone. In this way, Locke conceptualized and morally justified *possession*.

But how do you measure *effort*? If you are an empiricist – a perspective Locke helped to pioneer, you look for some publicly accessible indicator of it. Presumably (at least in the old days), *sweat* was involved and sweat is vulnerable to observation. Sweat, a *human* bodily resource, mixed, back then, literally, with soil, a *natural* resource, making the soil the property of the one *sweating* over it.<sup>5</sup> And, again, when another tried to deprive the farmer, he may have had to shed *blood*, his own even, to defend it. And *tears*, too, if he lost it. Normative “fluid dynamics,” if you will...

When lovers share saliva it is supposed to “mean” something. Sexual intercourse entails the mingling of more bodily fluids, a consummation sometimes conferring on each party a claim on the other, and which we also take to underwrite proper title parents have to their offspring. A mother initially shares her blood with her fetus and, postpartum, again more fluid in the form of lactation.

Blood, sweat, tears, milk, mucus, saliva, seminal fluids, skin oils, pheromones, urine (a dog or cat will confirm) – are how animals have always *marked what is theirs*. Fluids, even fluids so aerosolized their involvement is nearly homeopathic, is the medium of appropriation. Or so it used to be...

*No forfeited fluids, no proper claim to possession.* Locke must have had something like this principle in mind as the ultimate ground for legitimizing possession. (He didn’t harp on fluids as I am, but I am to make his case more explicit and vivid. What he actually said, we’ll spell out shortly.)

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3. To say I “have” a relationship with you is a weak form of possession. But all possession begins with acquaintance... Recall, the biblical notion of “knowing” someone. Needless to say, video conferencing has further abstracted or diluted the acquaintance form of what it means “to know.”

4. At least under some conceptions of rape, but see, for instance, “How bad is rape,” H.E. Baber *Hypatia* vol. 2, no. 2 (Summer 1987).

5. We still hear the phrase “sweat equity.”

So how valuable must a measure of the bodily fluid of a single animal be to justify their, even metaphorical, loss of it to justify a claim to possession?

Humans are animals with special abilities. (They say so themselves.) They create abstractions, hardened metaphors, and, with these, construct the foundations of civilization. Maybe evolutionary psychobiology roots them in bodily fluids, but humans animals can imagine pulling non-material things – ideas, concepts, abstractions, etc. things *not* composed of elements from the periodic table – straight out of the air – or the minds of philosophers. They are literally “brain-children” with no necessary material backing like gold is sometimes taken to be for legal tender. Or like the concept of “rights,” which if not rooted in some special dignity God supposedly invested in us (on the basis of God-only-knows-what, since it could not have been prior merit), then it must be that secular thinkers plucked this flower from its backing myth and, without asking anymore questions, used the concept of “right” (human and otherwise) to shore up what is called “civilization” – the quintessential *social* construction.

“Nonsense on stilts,” Jeremy Bentham called “rights,” sensing how cooked up the concept of “rights” was. But “rights” – the right to dignity, to privilege, respect, opportunity, sovereignty over one’s own body... that is to say, control over how *the fluids in the body* are expended, etc. are *not* rooted in anything material or empirical, anything accessible via one of the standard five senses. Locke wanted to say, everything inscribed onto the *tabula rasa* of a mind gets there in no their way than through one of these senses. Even the *physical* idea of a “brain” gets into a “mind” as a sense perception. There are no innate ideas. “Minds” and their contents such as the rules of logic, the tools of reason, the constructions of mathematics, too, are abstractions, that is to say, “cooked up,” that is to say, perhaps impossible to discard, but not objects of our senses. Being such should make us worry whether we might go too far with such abstractions... It’s not that we could function any other way. The point here is, we don’t have a similar worry with bodily fluids. *We only have so much and that’s it.* About 42 liters or 11 gallons. What you may contaminate with your allotted store is thus very *finite*. You cannot flood the universe with your fluids. Break this connection between bodily finitude and appropriation of resources in the world and all becomes theoretically *yours*.

Brains (not to be confused with “minds,” at least for Locke) and bodily fluids are made of molecules; in principle, collections of which, are perceivable. Perceptions of posited material constituents like these exhaust all of the “reality” we truck with – *for an empiricist*. But, whether most of us have ever been, it is seems clear now, we don’t typically behave like empiricists anymore. It seems we have reified, made abstract, what was once a very real and tangible thing: bodily fluid. What was grounded in the perception of a bodily fluid is now taken figuratively, having broken all the fetters that licensed possession which Locke attempted to circumscribe. Not only does value not need material to adhere to, it need not even pretend the appearance of it. From bit coin to human rights, we make it up. Even the fictional value of currency at least still requires a material substrate. *As long as enough of us are in on it, fictions function.* For awhile. Until we get carried away. And other sacred values are threatened – values that, if disregarded, threaten resistance.

The limit of what I can theoretically claim to be mine to control, it seems today, knows no bounds. The limits are *not* restricted by the exchange value of the 42 liters of fluid contained in my body. Property is limited only by my capacity to claim it, and the *power* I have to defend the claim. If the governing framework or system places no limits on the concentration of this power, there are no limits to what I may *own* – and, subsequently, what I may *do*.

Implied in the concept “social construction” is the idea that if we collectively construct things one way, nothing stops us from re-constructing them another way according to a revised set of values. We haven’t, quite yet, drained bodily fluids of their significance, but having replaced them as the basis for civilized transactions, we may revise or re-assign their *significance* more abstractly. We might say something special about *this* person’s bodily fluids makes them vastly more laden with value than the norm for our species. In other words, there are *qualitative* differences between people. Some are intrinsically worth more. We are manifestly *not* equal in the sense Locke thought we were.

## Now, to the point...

*The crown jewel of this oligarchy is a billionaire president, backed and bought by the world's richest man Elon Musk, running the world's largest economy.*

– Oxfam executive director Amitabh Behar<sup>6</sup>

In the next two years, the world will celebrate the first of a new class: [the trillionaire](#). As of late 2024, Elon Musk’s<sup>7</sup> wealth is increasing at an average rate of [\\$2.3 million per hour](#), 24 hours day, 7 days a week... Needless to say, due to the way money works on this scale, the [acceleration rate](#), not just the velocity of wealth concentration, is increasing. Not to be outdone, quasi-liberals<sup>8</sup> are in on this, too. They lag behind just now, but are working hard to close the distance. The wealth of Musk’s nearest competitors, Jeff Bezos and Mark Zuckerberg, *combined*, is still less than half of Musk’s. Musk overtly backed Donald Trump. Bezos expressed his admiration for how Trump handled having his ear pierced with a bullet. Bezos and Zuckerberg, who were once a bit on the fence, are warming up to Trump. Bill Gates, too, appears to be rethinking which side of the political spectrum best butters his toast. Many of the rest of the less privileged class of billionaires, the “poor-rich,” (e.g., Soros, *et al.*) still support beleaguered democrats, but give them time...

It’s true that there are many more among the “poor-rich” than in 200+ billion club – which, at present (early 2025), consists of only Musk, Bezos, and Zuckerberg. And it’s true that the wealth of the “poor-rich” remains spread so thinly they still often empathize with the strapped. (E.g., Nick Hanauer). But, again, give them time. It doesn’t seem it will be long now before they *either* join the 200+ billion club *or* consolidate into a *relatively* impecunious class – *not* to be confused with the one compassing the rest of us. *We simply don’t count*; soon, if not already, not even collectively – as long we persist in operating within the order of things that permitted this state of affairs to arise.

The widening income/wealth gap between the “poor-rich” and the “rich-rich” will determine future governance. It cannot fail to.

6. [“Billionaires growing richer faster than ever, says Oxfam,”](#) DW.org.

7. On Musk in the mid 1990s, [“Elon Musk is a ‘Tesla founder’, but he isn’t behind its main innovation | Electrek.”](#) Back at that time, I knew who Musk was. He was a hero to us in the EV community, which I was a part of. We knew him as the *then* millionaire with the resources to tackle what we knew was the only thing holding back electric vehicle development: batteries. We were a rag-tag bunch of [hands-on folks](#) who wanted EVs *sooner* rather than later for environmental and anti-war reasons as well as the aesthetics of more elegant motorized transportation.

8. What is the difference between “neo-liberals” and just plain “liberals”? The latter pay lip service to what used to be called *material* progressive ideals, while the former don’t bother with that anymore – perhaps, thinking *social* progressiveness a more economical way to retain the coveted, still wokish, “liberal” title.

## What does “bodily fluid dynamics...” have to do with this?

The 42 liters of fluid in Musk’s body are precious. Presently, they accrue value at 2.3+ million dollars an hour and the accrual is accelerating. Precious, indeed...

Or perhaps Locke’s theory no longer bears any relevance to the justification of Musk’s wealth. It’s outdated. The justification for his wealth, *and that of many besides Musk*, has long since departed from even a stretched appeal to that theory. Locke’s notion of *effort*, and the moral notions grounded in it: desert, merit, some measure of equality... have about as much to do with grounding title to property on this scale as the number 42 has to do with the ultimate answer to everything.<sup>9</sup>

But, if the fluids in a body can muster a claim to a sufficient concentration of wealth, the body can marshal the force requisite to make it so. Thrasymachus said it plainly right at the start of in Plato’s *Republic* two and a half millennia ago: “Might makes right.”

The new romance is with economics. Justification is financial. *No other sort exists.*

## From *fluid* to *property* to *power*

The old romance requiring *moral* justification for taking property out of public circulation can no longer bear the weight of reality. It is obsolete. Open now is a brave new path to moral efficiency: *violence*... Luigi Mangione got it. Remember: ethics is obsolete. Murder is ok. For how long? That depends on how much money you have, of course. Only sheer power to force matters here and now remains on the table. It is the most economic way to get things done. Don’t like this? Amass enough money.

Locke’s old theory tying how much power you may wield (while retaining some moral finesse) to how much of a wet stain you can leave is dead.

What if some, potentially, all of us,<sup>10</sup> even theoretically, *can* get *all* that we want?

Extreme concentrations of wealth with no *principled* upper limit make such thoughts plausible.

Since moral theories (and the political theories downstream from them) have always been founded on a need for limits. When these limits are perceived as no longer relevant, new horizons open.

For example, murder ceases to be taboo, since *the point of justice is to serve the interests of the stronger*, and, if the stronger have it in their power to murder you, *and* it is in their interest to do so, you will be murdered. There is no meaning to justice, let alone moral scruple, beyond that. This cuts all ways. At time  $t_0$ , it was in the interest of United Health Care to cut corners to maximize profits. At time  $t_1$ , Luigi Mangione was *right* to murder Brian Thompson because *at that moment* he could,<sup>11</sup> it was

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9. Curious how Douglas Adams came up with that number... There are [other speculative answers](#) but I think the 42 liters of fluid one resonates.

10. E.g., some [transhumanists](#).

11. Mangione had a gun, Thompson’s back was exposed. Given Mangione’s values, it was the most cost-effective way for him to convey the extent of his displeasure for what Thompson was significantly complicit with. Again, cost-effectiveness



within his power,<sup>12</sup> and the justice system existing to serve the interests of the stronger at time  $t_2$  will dispose of Mangione as it sees fit, and will be *right* to do so. The party strongest is a *moving* target. At  $t_1$  Mangione is right; at  $t_2$  the system is right. And so forth.

Nothing in the animal world militates against this, not without reifying abstractions seeking to impose acceptable norms that span time and circumstance, whose origin is *not* rooted in the raw power to make things happen. In other words, absent the concoction known as “civilization.” Thrasymachus accurately sketched nature’s brute force notion of justice. Perhaps, then, we are, finally, catching up to nature, having overcome civilizational drag. If not quite yet, “going forward,” what impedes us?

## Locke up close

Let’s review Locke’s theory<sup>13</sup> of how private property is justly acquired and limited to see what remains of its relevance:

- Each of us has a *right to exist equal* to that of all others to exist. No one is born with more right to this than anyone else.
- In the beginning, in “a state of nature,” all resources are held in common. No one has an *exclusive* right to anything.
- But everyone has a *right to what they need* because they have an equal right to exist.
- A thing becomes the *exclusive*, “*private*,” *property* of someone when this person mixes their effort, labor, “bodily fluid,” what have you... (something primordially *theirs*), with the previously unowned thing – as when they pick an apple from a tree and in order to eat it. The ownership begins at the point of picking the apple (because the picking involves *effort*), assuming the apple has not already been appropriated through the expenditure of effort by someone else: for example, a farmer has not already planted and tended the tree producing the apple.
- One limit, according to Locke, to what you may claim as your own is that there be “*enough and as good*” left for others having the same right as you to exist and the same claim to what they need to maintain their existence.
- Another limit is that you *not waste* what you claim. This means you do not let it spoil or prevent, pointlessly, its use – as this robs others of the opportunity to avail themselves of it, which would violate the “enough and as good” just cited proviso.

Locke does not specifically allude to “bodily fluids.” I use this phrase to make more concrete the abstract notion of “effort” or “labor,” which are “energy” events. Energy is abstract, unlike motion. A “bodily fluid” is phenomenologically accessible to an empiricist such as Locke. In essence, I am elaborating on Locke’s theory. The class of phenomenologically accessible bodily fluids include: blood, sweat, tears, mucus, digestive and seminal fluids, skin oils, urine, etc. (Other fluids, requiring more biological resolution to perceive as with many internal fluids, would be superfluous to cite, as we will see, shortly.) Whatever these fluids are, what matters here is their *finite* quantity. In Locke’s time – and

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to the end of achieving one’s interest is the rule.

12. *In the moment* and after, many others felt, and feel, that such oligarchs have it coming. Since it is the same class of oligarchs to which Thompson belongs who also enforce such laws. It was a contest of the stronger and *in that moment* Mangione won. The other side will later have its day, no doubt. But at no point are notions of justice *not* spelled out in terms of the power to effect outcomes.

13. His own words can be found in the Appendix.

for most of us most of the time, even now, the listed are the standard bodily fluids. The cited should be sufficient to suggest tractable, *concrete* stand-ins for *abstract* concepts such as effort or labor.

Because the amount of fluid in a body is finite – 42 liters roughly, there can be *only* so much effort or labor extracted from a body in the way there are *only* so many hours in a day, and in order to use these fluids to warrant a private claim to property. (Zero effort or labor may be extracted from a biologically *fluidless* body.) It must be, then, that there is a *finite* amount of property any individual may claim as their own, unless, of course, some of us have *singularly valuable* bodily fluids. Perhaps, some or all of your bodily fluids are vastly more valuable than mine – or even *infinitely* valuable. *If* that is possible, then you have the actual right to vastly – *potentially, infinitely* – more property than I. If so, then this seems to be in violation of Locke’s first principle: that we, each of us, has *equal* rights to existence and to tend to that existence. Some of us are just *inherently* more worthy of existing than others of us, and subsequently are less governed by the limits Locke wanted to place on the amount of property we may claim.

Add the further observation that concentration of *property*, wherever it is found, entails a concentration of *power* to affect its environment. At least in *this* world.

If there can be such a *qualitative* difference in the value of bodily fluids, it entails that some of us have more normative gravity with which to alter our social surroundings – that is to say, our *political* environment. In more explicit terms, governance may *legitimately* be molded to differentially serve the interests of inherently more valuable individuals.

Alternatively, we can block this conclusion by insisting that it is only the *quantity*, not any alleged *quality*, of the bodily fluids any of us may possess that dictates limits to property/power concentration and its normative force. While some of us may have the resources to make the political environment orbit us and our interest more than others may do for themselves and theirs, there are *limits* to this. How are these limits to be set? Locke seems to suggest:

*First*, we must insist they are *finite*. As bodily fluids are finite. 42 liters, recall.

*Second*, left must be “enough and as good” for all.

But how much is “enough” and what will count “as good”? This is an open question...

Plato, for one, thought “enough” meant sufficient for each individual to fulfill her or his function in an economy where justice demanded that everyone “mind their own business,” not in the (proverbial) sense of not interfering in someone else’s business, but in the more affirmative sense of *discovering, developing and realizing* their potential for both theirs *and* the good of their community (he conceived these goods, those of the self and the community, as intimately connected). A way to achieve this is to:

- do what you do *best*;
- *before* that, learn or discover what you do best – so that what you want and what you have a realistic chance of acquiring coincide in an *internal* harmony;
- subsequently, *discover* that the condition of knowing and doing your best is appreciated by your community resulting in the possibility of *external* harmony.<sup>14</sup>

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14. A future topic will focus on Plato’s *Republic*.



This corresponds to the “as good” part.

In short: *if the reasons I have to envy you are minimized, harmony’s chances are enhanced.*

In this way, a just and *necessarily* harmonious community is possible. Thus, for Plato, justice and harmony are not separable. This is in contrast to the view of Thrasymachus, where *separating justice and harmony, plants the seeds for strife* – for people feeling that is ok to assassinate CEOs, for instance, and moreover feeling justified in doing so. (I take it for granted that, though Mangione’s impulses or nerve or a willingness to invite predictable self-sacrifice were peculiar to him, his sentiments, his displeasure with the system, are not.)

Plato, of course, was not naive. The society he imagined has never existed, and, given the way human nature is, may never. Still, he liked to dream...

But suppose we disregard the *finitude* of property/power concentration... Suppose we leave the limits of this concentration open-ended, as it appears to be now in Western Neo-liberalist conceptions of political economy, permitting such characters as Elon Musk *et al.*... then what?

## Thrasymachus

*Murder is the most cost-effective way to effect change in society.*

*How much money is enough? There comes a point when this is no longer a matter of personal taste.*

– Bianco Luno

Early in Plato’s *Republic*, Thrasymachus gives Socrates a curt answer to the central question of the dialogue: *what is justice?* Thrasymachus says it is about serving those with the power to rule and lay down the law. In short, “might makes right.” Plato spends the whole rest of the long dialogue trying to find fault with this decree.

## The political and moral implications of unlimited wealth

If, as Elon Musk and others are showing, economics *trumps*<sup>15</sup> politics, and politics makes law, and, though it may not theoretically<sup>16</sup>, *as a practical matter*, law steers ethics, thus making ethics vulnerable to being trumped by economics too. Thrasymachus is right about might. In other words, murder may be the most *cost-effective* way to effect change in society.

This is how it is. *Should* it be?<sup>17</sup>

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15. Pun intended.

16. However much philosophers complain.

17. *If* there are solutions, one might be that discussed at the end of my “[Magical thinking about democracy](#)” series on political philosophy – *abolish politics*, as we know it. Consider a different way to do democracy.

## Resources

1. Locke on property – short video presentations by Alonzo Fyfe
  - [Origins](#)
  - [Limitations](#)
2. “[Meritocracy, economic turmoil, and the broken promises of the West](#),” full interview with Daniel Markovits, IAI – *Institute for Art and Ideas*. (Merit is *not* heritable. Plato pointed this out two and a half millennia ago.)
3. “[How the Elite rigged Society \(and why it’s falling apart\) | David Brooks](#),” Brooks offers a perspective of the traditional conservative right on what is wrong Western culture, ARC – *Alliance for Responsible Citizenship*.
4. “[How Elon Musk’s Texas Playbook Explains DOGE](#),” Musk’s priorities: a break a few eggs now to enable an expansive future for the species. *A More Perfect Union*.
5. Swedish podcaster Anders Acevedo offers a short, graphical intro to our topic, “[Why billionaires should be illegal](#).” We will mainly focus on just one of the problems he points out: the political, ultimately moral, one.
5. Music: [Cooking with Satan](#) | [Alvarius B.](#) and Sun City Girls hints at the problem with “buying low and selling high.” It can be fatally irritating.

## Appendix: Locke on property

From John Locke, [The Second Treatise of Government](#) (1690), Chapter 16, §§ 25–51, 123–26.

26. God, who hath given the World to Men **in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of Life, and convenience.** The Earth, and all that is therein, is given to Men for the Support and Comfort of their being. And though all the Fruits it naturally produces, and Beasts it feeds, belong to Mankind in common, as they are produced by the spontaneous hand of Nature; and no body has originally a private Dominion, exclusive of the rest of Mankind, in any of them, as they are thus in their natural state: **yet being given for the use of Men, there must of necessity be a means to appropriate them some way or other before they can be of any use, or at all beneficial to any particular Man.** The Fruit, or Venison, which nourishes the wild *Indian*, who knows no Inclosure, and is still a Tenant in common, **must be his and so his, i.e. a part of him, that another can no longer have any right to it, before it can do him any good for the support of his Life.**

27. Though the Earth, and all inferior Creatures be common to all Men, yet every Man has a **Property in his own Person.** This no Body has any Right to but himself. The *Labour* of his Body, and the *Work* of his Hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his *Labour* with, and

joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *Property*. [We employ the notion of “bodily fluids” to make this mixture of elements *inside* the body with elements *outside* of the body as vivid and as concrete as possible. This “mixing” or expenditure of fluids is what “labor” is ontologically.] It being by him removed from the common state Nature placed it in, hath by this *labour* something annexed to it, that excludes the common right of other Men. For this *Labour* being the unquestionable Property of the Labourer, no man but he can have a right to what that is once joined to, at least where there is enough, and as good left in common for others.

28. He that is nourished by the Acorns he pickt up under an Oak, or the Apples he gathered from the Trees in the Wood, has certainly appropriated them to himself. No Body can deny but the nourishment is his. I ask then, When did they begin to be his? When he digested? Or when he eat? Or when he boiled? Or when he brought them home? Or when he pickt them up? And 'tis plain, if the first gathering made them not his, nothing else could. That *labour* put a distinction between them and common. That added something to them more than Nature, the common Mother of all, had done; and so they became his private right. And will any one say he had no right to those Acorns or Apples he thus appropriated, because he had not the consent of all Mankind to make them his? Was it a Robbery thus to assume to himself what belonged to all in Common? If such a consent as that was necessary, Man had starved, notwithstanding the Plenty God had given him. We see in *Commons*, which remain so by Compact, that 'tis the taking any part of what is common, and removing it out of the state Nature leaves it in, which *begins the Property*; without which the Common is of no use. And the taking of this or that part, does not depend on the express consent of all the Commoners. Thus the Grass my Horse has bit; the Turfs my Servant has cut; and the Ore I have digg'd in any place where I have a right to them in common with others, become my *Property*, without the assignation or consent of any body. The *labour* that was mine, removing them out of that common state they were in, hath *fixed* my *Property* in them.



Extended writeup for the topic hosted at  
[The Philosophy Club](#) in March 2025  
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